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Lamorinda Tennis Teams have Sights Set on NCS Tournament

By Spencer Silva



Melissa Van Pell

For the second time in a month, the Campolindo Cougars (12-5 overall, 8-4 DFAL) scratched out a 5-4 victory over their rival, the Acalanes Dons (3-16 overall, 3-10 DFAL). Last Thursday, Oct. 30, the Dons were ready to play spoiler to Campo's prospects of securing lone possession of third place in the DFAL.

Dons' head coach Ellie Kahn recalled the last match, "We were competitive last time we played them. We won four matches."

Acalanes No. 1 singles player Melissa Van Pell did her part, dispatching of Hannah Ross in a hard-fought match in straight sets 6-4, 6-3. The two met earlier last month, although it was Ross who won in the previous meeting. Behind Van Pell's strong showing, along with senior Tara Barabi, Acalanes led 4-2 heading into the doubles matches. The Cougars, however, rallied to sweep the doubles matches and staked their claim on third place.

This was no coincidence as Campo coach Steve Robinson put it, "One of our biggest strengths is our depth. We're strong all the way through our doubles teams."

After winning the DFAL in 2012, the Cougars have been in rebuilding mode the last few seasons. They've exceeded expectations, and with a third place finish in the DFAL, they should be rewarded with a low-seed berth in the NCS tournament. Coach Robinson credits his girls' success to their strong sense of companionship and humility. "We pride ourselves on winning with grace and losing with grace. Top to bottom, everyone is happy where they stand."

Some of the key ingredients to Campo's success have been the transfer of Zoe Schneider from Miramonte. She's been versatile, playing both singles and doubles. The Cougars were also able to recruit Eva Spindler, who switched from volleyball to tennis this season. She's a quick study, already ascending to the No. 2 singles spot on the roster.

It was a mostly disappointing season for the Dons who were a surprise contender in 2013. A number of instances, including two of their best players moving out of town - sisters, no less - spelled trouble. There are glimmers of hope, however, as Van Pell and No. 2 singles player, freshman Sasha Schtein, will both return to anchor the roster in 2015. Schtein showed her big promise Thursday, rallying from an 0-6 first set loss to beat Spindler in a third-set tiebreaker. Coach Kahn said the team prides itself on strong chemistry and sportsmanship, something apparent in the signs scattered across the facility's fences in honor of the team's graduating seniors.

The local powerhouse during the regular season was the Miramonte Mats (17-4 overall, 11-1 DFAL) who were recently crowned co-champions of the DFAL with rival Dougherty Valley. The Mats aren't guaranteed a spot in the NCS tournament, however, as DV managed to "win" the league, technically, by a two-set tiebreaker. Still, they should be rewarded with a high-seed in the tournament in spite of the technicality. Senior Taylor James, who didn't lose a match during DFAL play, is the team's leader and captain. Just behind her is sophomore Riley Eversole, whose matches

against Dougherty swung the overall outcome of their meetings on both occasions - they lost at home, beat them away.

Coach Michael McCollum attributes his team's sustained success to not only having star players at the top, but also being able to play every girl on his roster with absolute confidence. Of the upcoming NCS and DFAL tournaments, McCollum says, "Monte Vista, Dougherty Valley, and Amador Valley are the top of heap. We were seeded sixth last year and lost to Foothill in the quarterfinal. But we're stronger than last year."

The DFAL tournament starts Nov. 11 and the NCS tournament begins the following week Nov. 18.



Hannah Ross Photos Gint Federas

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